

A Life-Changing Invitation

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[0 : 0 0] Excellent, what a special morning. These are always some of the greatest joys in our life as a church when we see Jesus at work in people's lives. And it's just been so great to see what God is doing in Reuben's. I just want to give a particular welcome, as I get my breath back, used to think I was fit, to Reuben's friends and family. I haven't managed to say hello to you this morning, but you're so, so welcome. It's a joy to have you. We love your boy. We will look after him, but just know how welcome you are here today. And let me welcome you to the strangest group of people on planet Earth. If you didn't know that before, churches are strange places and Christians are strange people. Now here's what I mean by that. According to a recent survey, did you know that there are something like 2.5 billion Christians around the world today? That's a lot of people, 2.5 billion. But let me take that overwhelmingly large figure and make it a much more manageable one. So here's the figure. It's 100. So if 100 Christians represented all of global Christianity, here's the stats. Take this in. 26 people would live in Africa. 24 people would live in Latin America.

23 people would live in Europe. 15 people would live in Asia. 11 people would live in North America. And one person would live in Oceania. And get this, your average Christian in the world today is a non-white woman living her life in the global South with lower than average levels of both societal safety and access to proper healthcare. How does that strike you this morning?

In our world, it seems to be getting increasingly divided and fractured and seems to be shouting across at each other. Let me put it to you that Christianity is the greatest social phenomena the world has ever seen. This really is a strange going on. This really is, if you're a 90s kid like me, this really is one for Mulder and Scully, isn't it? Welcome to the strangest group of people on planet Earth. Strangest and how do you explain that? 2.5 billion people. A group that started in a sense 2,000 odd years ago with a group of a dozen disciples following a 30-year-old carpenter turned preacher who came from Nazareth. Remember Leicester City won the Premier League a few years ago. What were they? 5,000 to 1. Who would have predicted that? Who would have predicted 12 to 2.5 billion in just over 2,000 years? Who would have predicted that? Well, as it turns out, what we're going to see in this passage, and I should have said this at start, we're going to be in Luke chapter 5 if you have a Bible.

1 to 11. We'll read it in a few moments time. Luke chapter 5. If you don't have a Bible, you can grab one in the pews around about you, or the words will go on the screen in just a few moments as well.

As it turns out, what we see in Luke chapter 5 is that Jesus predicted it. He predicted it. In fact, he did way more than just predict it. He guaranteed it. You see, what Jesus says here in this passage is the explanation of days like today. And it is the explanation of stories like Reuben's and like every single Christian who follows Jesus around the world. This is the explanation of why that happens. So here's what we're going to do. We're going to read from verse 1 of Luke chapter 5, and I want you to hear Jesus predict it and guarantee it. So this is Luke chapter 5.

[4 : 32] One day, as the crowds were pressing close to him to hear the word of God, Jesus was standing by the lake of Gennesaret. He saw two boats moored by the land. The fishermen had gone ashore and were washing their nets. He got into one of the boats. It was Simon's, and asked him to put out a little way from the land. Then he sat down in the boat and began to teach the crowd. When he'd finished speaking, he said to Simon, put out into the deeper part and let down your nets for a catch. Master, replied Simon, we were working hard all night and caught nothing at all.

But if you say so, I'll let down the nets. When they did so, they caught such a huge number of fish that their nets began to break. They signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. So they came and filled both the boats and they began to sink. When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus's knees. Leave me alone, Lord, he said. I'm a sinner. He and all his companions were gripped with amazement at the catch of fish they had taken. This included James and John, the sons of Zebedee who were partners with Simon. Don't be afraid, said Jesus to Simon. From now on, you'll be catching people. They brought the boats into land. Then they abandoned everything and followed him.

So here is this first century doctor come historian called Luke, who's taken the time in this gospel of Luke to do his investigatory homework to produce this well-researched account of the life of this man, Jesus. And this is what you'll find in the early chapters of Luke's gospel. In the opening chapters, he writes about Jesus's birth. We're going to be thinking about that over the next few weeks in church and in our country. You read about Jesus's birth. Read it and you'll see that that birth is supernatural and yet brimming with purpose. And Luke then moves on to tell you about Jesus's family tree. Again, read it and you'll see the stock that Jesus is from, questionable and yet full of hope.

And the message that Jesus is speaking, read it and you'll see a message that is controversial and yet is full of explosive power. Read it and you'll see that Jesus is wonderfully surprising.

Someone who does more than just flip the world upside down. Here is someone showing human beings what it is to live the right way up. You know, we had our boiler service the other day, flashing faults. Guy came to fix it, switch off the heating, new part in, fires it back up again, firing in all cylinders again. We've got heat.

[7 : 53] And it's easy to think of the human problem a bit like that, that all we need to do is just make a few tweaks, make a few adjustments, get a few new parts and hey presto, everything will be fine again.

But when the Bible talks about the human condition, it's actually a lot less boiler. It's a lot more like a bunch of flowers that you'd buy at a florist that look great for three or four days, but after a while they'll die.

And actually they started dying the very moment they were cut off from the very thing that was giving them life. You see, that's our problem as human beings. It's the essence of what the Bible calls sin that is in the human heart.

There's a lot of images that the Bible uses to talk about sin because it's a multi-dimensional problem that we all have. It's our natural inclination to turn away from our creator, reject his rule and want to go it our way. And that is our greatest problem, that we are not right with the God who made us. And yet here Jesus tell us how he's come to be the greatest solution, the perfect solution to our problem.

And it all centers on why he's come, to rescue sinners like you and me from God's judgment. But he does more than rescue people from the reality of hell. What he does is he transforms people. He sets people free. He gives people purpose and dignity in life.

[9 : 31] And he restores us to the very God who made us in his image. And you read on the Luke's gospel, you see Jesus stand up in all places at a Jewish synagogue.

In verse 18 of chapter 4. And he reads from one of the most precious prophecies anywhere in the Old Testament. If you scan your eye there, what you'll see is this prophecy from a prophet named Isaiah.

Keep that name in mind. And he's God speaking through him about someone who will come and bring a good news message of liberation for the world. All the world to here, who will put things right, who will make things new, who will set people free, who will deal with our biggest problem as human beings, that sin problem. Jesus reads it and it ain't controversial.

It'll be getting whoops and hallelujahs, I'm sure. But what is controversial is that Jesus reads it and he says, that person who's come to do that, it's me. Now that is a mic drop moment if ever I've seen one in the gospels. And that's why from this point on in the gospel, Luke focuses on Jesus' word.

Because it's this word that Luke is helping us join the dots to see that it's this word that brings liberation to the poor. And people say that about Jesus. The end of chapter 4 verse 31 is Jesus heals this demon-possessed man. The crowd comment that his word has, and it's the word beginning with A, authority. And Jesus has set, verse 43, on taking this message out. So from this point in the gospel, word is going out. And so here we are then, opening verse of chapter 5, on the shores of Lake Gennesaret.

[11 : 24] And the great crowd have gathered, not just to see Jesus, a great crowd have gathered, do you see it, to hear Jesus. Because they recognize that he's not primarily a good man or a wise teacher or even a messenger from God.

When he speaks, they hear the very words of God himself. When he speaks, things happen. When he speaks, life's change. When he speaks, change, change, break.

And who's there by the lake working away, do you see him? Is this man called Peter. Day job? Fisherman. Owns a boat. Has business partners there. And he's washing his nets after a long night.

And Jesus says to him, I want to use your boat. And after he's finished teaching, do you see what he says, verse 4, chapter 5? I want you to pull out into the deep again and drop your nets.

Now, Peter at this point, fisherman, experienced as he was, thinking to himself, to head out into the busy waters during the heat of the day instead of the quiet waters of night is a massive waste of time.

[12 : 49] If you know anything about fishing, the place and the chance to catch them is when the waters are still. And this is a carpenter giving a fisherman instructions. This is like a circus performer going to a hospital, donning the scrubs, heading to the operating table and telling the surgeon, I see that you've made the incision there, but how about you just try and make it on the other side?

This is nonsense. And yet, Peter says, at your word, master. He perceives something about Jesus' word. He's maybe seen, he's maybe heard. His mother-in-law has just been healed in the verses just before.

Peter recognizes there's something about Jesus' word. Maybe it's a Dr. Pepper moment here in Peter's life. I don't know. What's the worst that can happen? And what follows is an unexplainable catch. Notice the eyewitness details if you've got the text there.

Their nets were breaking due to such a large catch of fish, so much so that they had to signal for their partners to bring another boat. And even then, the boats were sinking. And eyewitness details that Luke pummels the reader with, an attempt to show us how extraordinary this was.

And it's amazing, actually, think about it. Jesus has turned a potentially financial devastating evening into an unprecedented windfall. But then we get an unmissable response.

[14 : 21] Do you see how Peter's not rubbing his hands with glee, cracking open a bottle of bubbly, singing, I'm in, the money. Yeah? His reaction is that he's utterly undone by this encounter with Jesus.

This man has blown his mind wide open. Isn't it interesting that the first thing he's aware of in this encounter with Jesus is not his smallness, it's not his his unimpressiveness, it's his sinfulness.

Isn't that interesting? Now, this is more than just I was in the presence of greatness, right? In our celebrity culture, it's often what happens when you find yourself having to be in the same shop as a famous person.

We go all, oof, don't we? This is more than just he's in the presence of greatness, way more than that. Peter recognizes that he's in the presence of God himself. Just like Isaiah before him, in Isaiah chapter 6, his reaction to being in the presence of God is, woe is me.

And there's huge connections. We can follow up afterwards if you want between Isaiah chapter 6 and Luke chapter 5. Woe is me because I am a man of unclean lips, says Isaiah.

[15 : 46] And Peter recognizes in this point that he has got nothing to bring to the negotiating table. The only card that he's got to play is not marked me, M-E.

The only card he recognizes he can play begins with M-E but ends in R-C-Y. Do you see? He goes mercy. And the ball at this point is well and truly in Jesus' court.

The next move is his. And what happens next, dear friends, you need to see this, is Jesus to a T. He doesn't go all Oprah Winfrey on him, does he?

And say, Peter, get up. You need better self-esteem. You need bigger goals. You need to think better about yourself. That will always be the top sellers in the Kindle store, those kind of books.

But Jesus knows that just doesn't work when it comes to the human condition. But nor has he gone all Roy Keane on him. Yeah, if you know Roy Keane, the notoriously harsh Irish football pundit, Jesus doesn't say, Peter, you're not fit to wear the jersey.

[16 : 53] Sinful man, you don't know the half of it, son. This is Jesus. Jesus does neither of those things. Here is Jesus, the one who was there before the beginning of anything.

This is Jesus, the one who knows all of Peter's mistakes, past, present, and future. And what does he say? What's his opening line? Just like Gabriel said to Mary, verse 10, he says, do not be afraid.

Again, interesting, striking. Do not be afraid. What does he recognize is going on in Peter's heart? There's a lot of fear. Do not be afraid. And from there, see Jesus make an unexpected call.

He says, from now on, you will be fishing for people. And that's the punchline of the drama here. This is what it was all about.

The great haul of fish. I didn't really think about it that much until this week. Why fish? Jesus could have done all sorts of things. Why fish? Well, I guess this is speaking Peter's language in a way.

[18 : 01] But he's always saying, see this great haul? Those fish, they represent people. That's what's going to happen down the generations, across the nations, through history, as my words, as this gospel goes forth.

Here's what I want you to know. If you're a Christian here today, you are a fish. You are a fish who has been drawn into Jesus' gracious net.

You have been hooked, lined, and sinkered by the fishermen par excellence. Why do days like today happen? Why do stories like Reuben's happen?

Because right here, Jesus guaranteed that it would. And here's real quick things to see. Number one, it means that every moment is a learning moment with Jesus.

Do you see verse 11? Peter, James, and John, who would become Jesus' inner circle of three. And they left everything and they followed him.

[19 : 09] You could argue that much of the rest of Luke's gospel is the record of their three-year-long apprenticeship with Jesus. Jesus invites them to come and learn from him.

Jesus invites them to come and learn his heart for people. Come and learn his father-shaped priorities.

Come and learn how life in his kingdom works. Come and learn who they are. Can I just say it's only by coming to understand Jesus, this God, that we can truly come to understand ourselves.

Come and follow me and most of all learn what it means for me to be your savior. You see, way before this is about us serving Jesus, this is about Jesus serving us.

It's always the way around it goes. when Peter says, I am a sinful man, I just say he's not wrong. The rest of this book is full of his mistakes, but Jesus will go to the cross to die for Peter's sin.

[20 : 21] He will go to the cross to die for my sin. He goes to the cross to die for your sin, and he rises again to show that that payment, that debt has been paid, it's gone through in the eyes of a holy God.

Peter, as he takes Jesus' word in the power of the Spirit to the world, will begin to see the beginnings of this great catch. You see, with Jesus, every moment is a learning moment.

They followed him. It's what to be a disciple is, to be a lifelong learner. And with Jesus, every day is a fishing day.

Do you know what I love? I love that Jesus could have quite easily have commanded the fish to jump into the net all by themselves. Could have done that, right? But he says, Peter, I want you to be the one to drop down the net.

You see, Jesus is guaranteeing the work, this is his catch, but he wants to do it through everyday people like Peter and like you and like me. Do you know what I thought as well this week?

[21 : 33] That he's also in control of the fact that Peter during the night caught nothing. Think about that. He's also in control of the fact that Peter during the night caught nothing. I wonder whether in this moment he wants Peter to feel his emptiness and to know that without Jesus, he can do nothing.

So often where the Lord takes us in life, isn't it? And from this point on, Jesus goes on the biggest recruitment drive the world has ever seen, calling people to come and to join the work with him.

While fishermen snatch living fish away to death, do you see how it's flipped? The disciples are going to be involved in snatching dying people away and giving them life.

They leave their family fishing business and they become part of his family fishing business. Taking this message about him to their immediate neighbors, the surrounding regions, and to the ends of the earth.

2.5 billion people. And that's just across the world today. You multiply that down to generations, that's a lot of people. Jesus says, come and follow me.

[22 : 49] You know, just as we close, just want to show my kids built yesterday when I was at men's breakfast. We had a men's breakfast up here between 9 and 11. This is what our kids did while I was there.

As we were all fighting to get here to the room, we were almost clapping every person that came in the door because it was so difficult. Johan even managed to come with his crutches on the bus and we were whooping and everything.

It was great. But did you enjoy the snow yesterday? Yeah? This is what my kids built. Needless to say, they are all my hats and scarves. Here's the question that came at night.

As he reflected, as he told me on these things about the carrot for the nose and about the hats that he put on, about the scarves, about the works to build these snowmen. All the snow that fell, the question came to me last night, do you think the snow will still be there tomorrow?

And here's the picture today, less than 16 hours. Yeah? And I guarantee you when I go home, those two stumps will not be there anymore. It's crazy, isn't it? How that's happened in such a short space of time.

[23 : 54] But here's the thing. We live in a world that is saying to us, invest in things, love things, you need things, that friends just will not last. Do you know, looks will fade, jobs will start and end, our emotions will dip and dive, people will come and go in and out of our lives.

question for us to think about, particularly if you don't know this Jesus, is the thing that you're building your life on going to last? Or is it going to be like the snow? It's going to be here looking very impressive one day and in a matter of hours it could be all gone.

What I want us to see is that Jesus is calling us here, all those who follow him, no matter how unimpressive you think you are, no matter how short or how long you've been a Christian for, he's inviting all those who follow him to come and be part and participate in the greatest mission this world has ever known.

And to invest ourselves in the one thing in this life that's going to last. When he says, come and I will make you fishers of men, it really is an invitation to the greatest mission the world has ever seen.

So let's pause just for a minute and I'd love us just to pray. And maybe particularly this morning if you don't know this Jesus for yourself is something that's been said or read or something that Ruben said, anything like that or we've sung is maybe just piqued your interest.

[25 : 21] Dear friends, don't waste this moment. Grab somebody who you've come with maybe in the quietness now bring your own prayers to this God. Maybe today is the day of salvation for you. So let's just have a moment of silence and then I'll pray and then we're going to stand to sing our final song.

Come all you who are thirsty come to the waters and you who have no money come buy and eat.

Come buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend money on what is not bread and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me and eat what is good and your soul will delight in the richest of fear.

Thank you Lord that that's how grace works. Thank you that we bring nothing to the negotiating table before you a holy God. Father, thank you for your mercy.

Thank you for your grace in welcoming people like us. I pray Father today that as we think about, as we've seen the newness of life that Jesus brings, his death on the cross, paying the debt of our sin, his resurrection life that the spirit gives.

[26 : 42] Lord, I pray that we would be, some of us particularly would be moved to give our lives to the Lord Jesus. So Father, we thank you for this time. Thank you for each other.

Be with us now as we finish our time together. We just pray for Reuben. I thank you for him Lord. We thank you so much for the way that you've been at work in his life, how he's just come and given himself over the last little season to the life of the church here.

And may today be a special one, particularly for him. So Lord, thank you for your love for him. Thank you for your love for us. And we just pray all of these things in Jesus' wonderful name.

Amen.